



CAESAR'S QUESTIONS AND JESUS' ANSWER

By Frank Cordaro

When I see the man without work on the bum, I often ask myself, "why?" When I see the woman on the street afraid to go home for fear of being beaten up by her boyfriend, I ask myself, "why?"

In a Catholic Worker House of Hospitality, asking "why?" is about as traditional as dishing out a bowl of soup in a soup line. It is an integral part of the movement. We ask a wide range of questions: Why is there unemployment? Why do people have no place to stay? Why are people so violent with each other? Why are there not enough homes to live in? Why do people eat so poorly in this country? Why is education so poor for some citizens? Why is health care so expensive? Why do people pay more and get less? Why don't people own anything anymore but simply possess things on credit? Such questions are unending. However, it is the point of view from which you ask the question that determines the answer.

Today, just as in former days, the dominant questions being asked are the questions of Caesar, i.e., the state, the bureaucracy, yes, even the institutional church. What is the problem? What are the statistics which prove there is a problem? What projects or programs can we create to solve the problem? How are the majority going to be reached? How much unemployment is necessary for a healthy economy? And so on.

Caesar's questions are posed in such a way that man is required to answer them through his own power. "We will create jobs through government programs." "We will create housing projects to give people homes." "We will make laws to protect property and secure peace." "We will create a Federal Food Regulatory Commission."

"We will pass laws for Equal Educational Opportunities." "We will develop a Welfare System to meet the needs of the folks who ain't making it in our system and we will exploit their needs to make our system work better by doling out to them just enough federal dollars to keep them consuming." Caesar's questions and answers for the poor and needy in our society keep them stagnant or make them progressively worse off than they were before. At the same time, those people who truly wish to help the poor are kept far away from them, their power is diffused by red tape, and they are lost in the rationalizations of Caesar's own questions and answers.

Caesar's questions allow for the whole host of half truths that have historically plagued mankind. The rationalization behind war is perhaps Caesar's greatest achievement. War is necessary evil which weighed against certain perceived alternatives is a good. "If we don't clobber the other guy, he'll clobber us." "If we don't take to arms, our loved ones will be destroyed." "Existence under tyranny is no existence at all." Even the Church has joined Caesar to explain that in certain cases (those occasions that MY country deems fit) war is the only moral thing to do. "Our" war is a "just" war. The "Double Effect" theory: our act of violence will produce two effects -- one bad and one good. The good from our act will far outweigh the bad, e.g. thirty-two years ago the atom bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima and at least 100,000 people were killed in a few seconds, but the war ended. And so it goes until we reach the nuclear stand off of our own day. However, in our day both sides can destroy each other totally. Do Caesar's rationalizations make any sense now? How is it that the Churches have not joined together to outlaw all modern warfare, especially since all our medieval rationalizations no longer apply? How is it that when the Pope speaks to Catholics, he can initiate countless arguments centering around countless subjects, but when he speaks out against nuclear proliferation, his is merely a voice crying out in the wilderness?

I believe that much of the modern Christian's dilemma has its roots in the kind of questions being asked. The Jesus we see in scripture seems very strange and distant to us. We do not know how to read and pray over scripture. Therefore we find ourselves straining to make a strange Jesus answer our questions for us. Many well intentioned Christians try to answer Caesar's questions with this strange Jesus' answers and come up wanting.

The scriptural Jesus' answer calls for some very specific questions -- questions rooted in God and Salvation History and the people of Israel. Jesus is the answer to the questions of the Old Testament, plus he is a new question in his own right. There are givens in these questions -- things that cannot be part of the questions. There is a God and we -- all of us -- are called to be his people. We do have a choice, yet what has happened, what is happening and what will happen is GRACED.

Our question now is how are we to respond to our God? -- no longer a God "out there," but Emmanuel, "God with us!" Jesus has helped us refine the question by moving us from our "how" to his "Who?" (see Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christ the Center).

"How?" is a dangerous question because it can so easily become a Caesar question -- a question which allows human beings to have an answer of their own making. In Jesus we can no longer be misled into a Caesar question. The Jesus question is "Who do you say that I am?" (Mk. 8:27; Mt. 16:15; Lk. 9:20). Serious searching for our answer to this question will always keep us on the right track. When the question is "who?" we look for a person, not a program. We look for the person of Jesus rather than a doctrine. And the truth is no further than the person with whom we are in contact. Caesar will never see the truth in persons because he is asking the wrong question.

(Cont'd on p. 11)



NOTES FROM NORMAN

By Norman Searah

It's getting cold outside as I sit here. It's colder back in my home state of Mass. People are starting to ask me for blankets because they're cold at night. Some of those people, like my friend Wayne, had their gas turned off. Some time ago one of the guys from Corrie House was looking for an article he read in the newspaper to show to Wendy. He told me that the article was about a baby girl freezing to death while her parents tried to stay warm. When I heard about the baby, then a few days later learning that close to a dozen people -- 12 human beings -- died in the snowstorms that hit the east coast, it hurts when you think that people shouldn't die freezing as much as people shouldn't die in war when there is no need for war.

Right now I'm realizing that I need blankets more than I need Christmas gifts to give to people.

I don't know why, perhaps by giving a gift of a blanket it shows that you really care in another way so instead of me begging for blankets I would like to ask you for your old but still good blankets so I can give them to people so they won't freeze. You see it's easier to freeze to death than it is to starve to death.

I also would like to ask you for your empty Iowa refund bottles and cans. I'm still collecting bottles and cans in order to get a truck some day, so I can help out more people.



I would like to say Thank you to the following people who have collected bottles and cans for me in the last few weeks:

Dennis McLaughlin
Ed Fallon and family
Michael and Russ Otto
Heidi

I would like to say Thank you again to the students of St. Pius X School and to Sister Pat Rigby.

Thank you.

Norman

Friday nights at 7:30 we have worship at the Catholic Worker House. Please join us!



community

KATIE BOBBITT
LUKE BOBBITT
WENDY BOBBITT
JIM HARRINGTON
PATTI MCKEE
CHUCK PIERI
JOHN RUTT
NORMAN SEARAH
MARLA WELLS

Again, many many thanks to our ghost producer. Whatever would we do without you?

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

At this time of year we are always especially conscious of how much our work depends on the generosity of people who support the community. With winter coming on we are faced with heating bills for four houses, and the prospect of taxes on all of them coming up in the spring. This winter we are working on rehabbing the new house at 1310 7th St. as well, which means plenty of extra expenses.

At the Catholic Worker we depend entirely on contributions from people who believe in and want to participate in our work for peace and justice. We neither seek nor accept grants or contributions from agencies or the government. In this way we affirm our belief in personalism, the concept that to give directly to people in need strengthens the ties among us and deepens our understanding of each other. We also remain free to pursue our own vision and to act upon the need we see around us as we see fit.

We ask that you keep in mind the need of the poor and be generous in your giving. Please do what you can. Checks should be made out to the Des Moines Catholic Worker, at Box 4551, Des Moines, IA 50306.

NEEDS

- *money to pay winter heating bills and for house renovations
- *tools -- all kinds
- *willing hands to help with rehabbing our new house
- *meat
- *cleaning supplies
- *Pampers

We really need your prayers and your help as we try to keep up the work we have been doing at the house while working to fix up the much needed new house on 7th st. Please keep us in your prayers and lend a hand if you can.

THANK YOU

It is just incredible to see how much food, blankets, and warm clothing has come through our doors in the past week and a half. Even though we didn't do a special collection of Thanksgiving turkeys like we did last year, we were able to give away almost as many -- over 60! The day before Thanksgiving we had over 100 people come to the food store but it wasn't overwhelming since food has been pouring in so much that everyone received either a turkey or a substantial bag of canned goods and groceries. So much is still pouring in that we will be doing the same thing again tomorrow. Many, many thanks to all the churches and individuals who have been bringing food in a steady stream for days now. We wish we had written down your names so we could thank you here but you know who you are. Your generosity really helped make a difference for a lot of people this holiday season.



HANDS ON THE NEVADA TEST SITE

In conjunction with the March action at the Nevada Test Site, the HAND Collective, a group of women in Boulder, CO, is planning to cover the fence at the Nevada Test Site with hand-prints from all over the world of people calling for an end to nuclear testing. To participate, make a print of your hand in permanent paint or ink on cloth and write your name, city and country underneath. Large group hand banners welcome. For more info contact HAND, 2119 Pine St., Boulder, CO 80302

A few months back we received a lengthy letter from a peace group in North Korea outlining their work and seeking to establish relationships with peace groups in the US. We recently received a second letter and are printing their address so that interested readers can correspond with them.

O Mun Han, Vice-Chairman
Korean Anti-Nuclear Peace Committee
Pyongyang, D.P.R. of Korea

OUR NEWEST MEMBER

Hi, I'm Chuck Pieri and I'm the newest member of the Catholic Worker Community. I graduated from SUNY at Cortland with a B.A. in Sociology during the spring of 1987. I was looking for jobs in the social service field when I decided to join the Brethren Volunteer Service. This organization is associated with the Church of the Brethren, an historic peace church. This position is unpaid and emphasizes service in social service agencies and peace organizations through the experience of a simple life.

During the orientation session in Chicago, I chose a project involving peace work overseas, but because of details that have to be worked out, I was assigned to an interim project in Des Moines.

I work at the Iowa Peace Network during the week and take shifts at the Catholic Worker House on some nights. Through both of these experiences, I am gaining an awareness and a better understanding of the social injustices that occur in the local community as well as in the global community.

I recommend the Brethren Volunteer Service or any other organization that brings together the elements of peace, love, and understanding into the lives of other people. Through nurturing and guidance, individuals will become at peace with themselves and affect those around them, creating a world which sees peace as the only way of existing.

THINK ABOUT IT!!!

HOMELESS RALLY

A rally to commemorate the homeless who have died of exposure will be held Dec. 21 on the steps of St. Ambrose Cathedral, 6th & High St. in Des Moines, at 4:30 PM. The rally is in conjunction with rallies to be held in 5 other cities.

For further information, contact Patti McKee at 243-0765.



Robert McGovern

HOMEWARD BOUND JAN 5-7
Midwest Regional Conference on Homelessness Jan 5-7
Conference will be held at the Olmsted Center of Drake University. For more information contact Mike King, c/o Des Moines Coalition for the Homeless, PO Box #4506 (515) 232-5208



OUR NEW HOUSE

The new house is beginning to look more like a house and less like a wreck! Jim, Bobby and some of our friends in the neighborhood have been working on fixing it up for a month now and its new coat of paint and plastic on the windows should leave it pretty well weather proof as well as much more presentable (from the outside anyway!). We even got a back door on it! We really hope friends will come by and check out the house, especially if you think there might be some way you can plug in. We're sure there is. We especially need people with skills or interest in carpentry, electrical work or plumbing.

Special thanks to Bobby Tapp, Ron Bush, Paul Dautremont and Roberto Bojorquez, who spent endless hours over the last month pulling nails out of a vast amount of used lumber. Maybe it didn't take too much skill but it took a lot of heart and a lot of patience! Most of the work yet to be done is the same way. So please come by, and don't worry if you're not a professional.

One of our biggest needs in working on the house is still getting some tools. We've been spending a lot of time chasing them down since most of what we are using is borrowed from the Tool Lending Library or other friends. If you have tools you don't use, if you see some at a garage sale, if your church can do a special collection, it would make a big difference.

A major item we will be needing for the house very soon is windows, since virtually all of them were broken out during the years the house stood vacant. This will be a huge expense, and if any churches want to take it on as a project please let us know. It would help a lot!



JOB DESCRIPTION OF A CATHOLIC WORKER

By J.R. Rutt

First, a few disclaimers: this article is written with tongue firmly in cheek! As some author has observed, humor, sometimes, is closer to the truth than "factual" reporting ...

The following is the current Job Description for a standard issue, run-of-the-mill Catholic Worker:

#The patience of Job (especially, patiently replacing toilet paper in the main bathroom, which always seems to run out, especially when you've brought a spare roll upstairs from the pantry just yesterday!)

The humor of Brother Juniper of the Franciscan Friar Minors, unless you fancy putting in for at least an honorary martyrdom by insanity caused by the blasted phone ringing off the hook, usually at the most inconvenient times!

Watching the house and trying to figure out what to fix for supper, after looking in the pantry and seeing that all we've got is a ton of various obscure spices (what in the blazes can you make using coriander as a seasoning?), some home-canned whole tomatoes, and packaged macaroni and cheese. (If the author eats much more pasta, the community is thinking of renting him out as a mobile billboard for advertising).

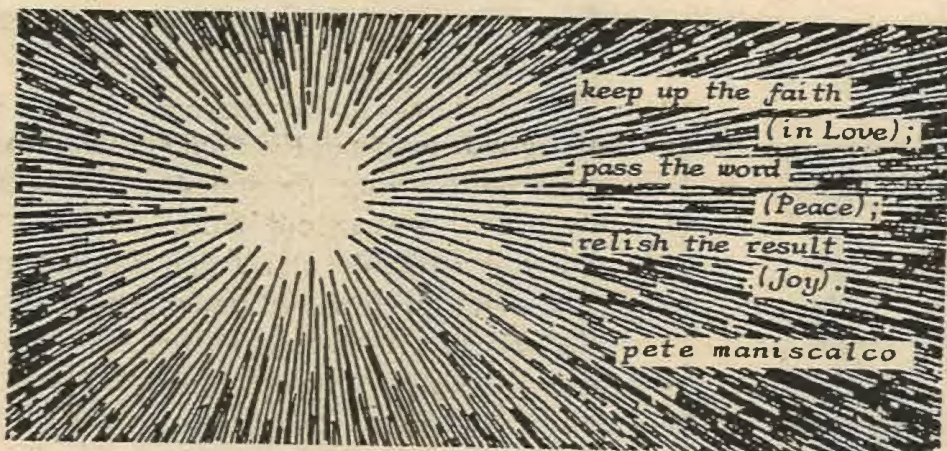
Reminding yourself, for about the millionth time, to try and remember to look for the face of Christ in all those coming through our doors asking for help. Not always an easy task, especially with the more demanding of our guests. Some author says that we Christians should feel ashamed when the poor come asking us for food, clothing, and shelter which we have taken from them, contributing to their being poor: we, who have too much of the world's goods are helping create the poor who are coming to us for help.

Trying, in a prudent way, to simplify your life: not stuffing your closet with clothes you know you'll never wear. When you're working, be responsible with your income in a manner consistent with the Gospels: that is, Christian stewardship. Also, handling the environment and natural resources in a responsible christian way.

Remembering to be polite and considerate with your fellow staff and community members. Sometimes you're more polite to strangers and guests than your community members!

I'm sure I've forgotten a bunch of obvious areas, but that's the best I can do today. And, to be a survivor in the maelstrom of human emotions and events called Western Society in America in the latter quarter of the Twentieth Century, sometimes doing your best for now, is all one can do!

As the Spanish say, "Valla con Dios!" : "Go with God!"



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THANKSGIVING? (Or for that matter, Christmas)

By Patti McKee

Christmas in September, come get your tree trimmings. Plan early. Shop, shop, shop.

Wait a minute, what about Thanksgiving???

Yes, what about Thanksgiving? Is it just a time to stuff ourselves on turkey and get together with family and friends or watch a football game? The first Thanksgiving in this country came after a long year of hardship, sickness and death, suffered by the Pilgrims. They sacrificed much to reach this first Thanksgiving and were blest with a good harvest and new friends with the Indians.

Giving thanks to God, of course, did not start with the Pilgrims. The Scriptures, especially the Psalms, are full of thanking God for our blessings. I think we in this country need to renew our tradition of giving thanks.

Our approach to Christmas might be different if we took Thanksgiving to heart, realizing how much of what most of us in this country have comes at the sacrifice of the poor in this country and the world. The US is only 6% of the world's population but uses 25% of the world's resources. Much of what we have is a "sacrificial gift" from the poor of the world. They sacrifice so we can live in abundance. A humbling thought, isn't it.

What does that mean for us in the land of consumerism at Christmastime? Christmas is actually the celebration of a gift received, that gift being Christ. In coming to earth, Christ emptied himself of his privileges of being divine but not its responsibilities. That meant a great sacrifice on his part, especially when it came to dying for our sins.

Are we willing to accept the responsibilities of this gift made of sacrifice? In accepting this gift we are called to give up our wants and needs that are conjured up by present day commercialism, so that others in this world will have their basic needs met.

This responsibility is not just a once a year giving at Christmas but a lifetime day by day commitment. Are we ready to meet the challenge?

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE COMMUNITY



There have been a lot of comings and goings around the community, so we thought it was about time for an update on who's who and what's going on at the house.

A couple of months ago Ron Clay, who spent about six months in the community, moved back to the streets. We really miss his strong feeling for the homeless and the injustice of their situation. We felt a lot of failure at his leaving, both on a personal level as friends and a community, but we hope that Ron is doing OK wherever he is.

We miss Kari too with her astounding enthusiasm and energy and open heart. We hope she'll be back for another visit soon. Her new home is St. Anthony House, 1610 Locust Omaha NE 68110.

New on the scene here is Bobby Swann, back in Des Moines after a year in Washington DC. Bobby has been working with Jim to rehab the new house at 1310 7th St and filling in on pickups and covering the house.

Another new face is Chuck Pieri, a Brethren Volunteer who will be living at Corrie House and working at Iowa Peace Network while he waits for a longer term assignment probably in Dublin early next year. Chuck just got here this week but he already seems like a familiar face.

As for the rest of us, working on the new house has really changed things around here. Jim has been working over there every day, which means the rest of us are spending a lot more time on the house -- a good thing all around. The guests are plugging in everywhere with cooking, cleaning, and babysitting, and we are very grateful for their help!



Katie, who turns 15 months this week, runs the house most of the time, rearranging all the drawers and cabinets on an hourly basis. Luke, our resident guide to fun and mischief at the Catholic Worker, keeps things hopping especially when we have a house full of kids as we do most of the time.



The Bojorquez family is back with us and is living at the house on Indiana Ave. That house hasn't looked this good in years! Omar and Fernando are going to school at McKinley, and 2 year old Nora, who somehow is always clean and neat, spends a lot of time with her buddy Katie at the Catholic Worker. Filomena has been helping out regularly at the house, while Roberto continues to work on the new house when he is not on his outside job. It's really great to have them back.

Marla, who took a full-time job with ARC a couple of months ago, has been off schedule for some time, which means she works harder than ever around the house. This woman never takes a break! Working for ARC Marla has several handicapped patients she takes care of on a regular basis, bringing them the same one-on-one concern that is such a strength in her relationships with guests and community here.

Norman and John have taken over the food store as well as most of the other unscheduled jobs like house laundry and pickups. Norman is gearing up for Christmas, collecting all kinds of blankets and presents for everyone he has ever heard of. Bottles and cans have been pouring in lately and the fabled truck looks like it may become a

reality pretty soon. John quit his outside job and in addition to his regular night shifts spends a lot of time around the house. This is great news especially for Katie who thinks he is her personal playmate. John has a gentle spirit and willingness to drop anything on no notice to help out that can't be beat.

Patti continues to work with the Coalition for the Homeless and the recently formed ANAWIM group which is working to rehab low income housing, as well as working with Trinity United Methodist's Breakfast Club and tutoring programs. Somehow in there she still finds time to take the house, stay on top of the community bills, keep Ligutti House in order and make Christmas presents. We don't know how she does it.

As for me, Wendy, I was getting very bored with cooking and cleaning, so working on the new house has been a great chance to learn some new skills and do something different. I've been having a wonderful time learning how to put up shingles, take trim on, take nails out of boards, etc. Everyone has been very tolerant of my clumsy efforts and I'm having a lot of fun!

With the cold weather, the house has been full of guests and friends. The more friends the better, so we hope everyone will feel free to stop in to chat and visit with us. It's a great opportunity for all to get to know each other better and to find out what the work is like first hand. Please come!



IOWANS ATTEND DOROTHY DAY 'S 90TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION AND DO ACTION AT THE NEVADA TEST SITE

By Helen Tichy

Under the inspiration of Father Frank Cordaro, his mother Angela, Kathryn Eperson, chairperson of the Harrison Co. Catholic Council, and myself accompanied him to Las Vegas to participate in Dorothy Day's 90th birthday celebration and do an action on the test site (maybe). Kathryn and I were not sure at this point whether we would cross the line.

Another Iowan, Brian Terrell from the Maloy, Iowa, Catholic Worker, was also in attendance at the celebration and did the action at the test site. Brian was also part of a workshop, "Beyond the Soup Kitchen". His topic was "Farm and Community Co-op".

Seventy worker houses were represented. They extended from Maine to the state of Washington.

The main speaker was Dom Helder Camara, retired archbishop from Brazil noted for his work with the poor. An idea he expressed was that God was the creator of the earth and we are to be co-creators. Seeing our bombs, God must think, "They don't like what I created." Shelley Douglass, co-founder of Ground Zero, and Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers, were also speakers. The Catholic Worker was one of the early supporters of Chavez. In 1972 Dorothy Day got arrested and went to jail for the United Farm Workers.

Tim Lambert of the New York Catholic Worker, Marcia Timmel, plowshares activist and member of the Olive Branch Catholic Worker in Washington DC, and Fr. Frank Cordaro of Logan IA conducted a workshop called,

"Walkin' the Walk: Poverty, Service, and Resistance".

Tim Lambert contrasted the "Works of Mercy," which are:

Feed the Hungry
House the Homeless
Bury the Dead, etc.

with the "Works of War," which are:

Inflict Wounds
Kill the Living
Burn the Crops
Destroy Property, etc.

Marcia Timmel said we must root our daily lives in non-violence. The power of non-violence is great and we must transform the world by our non-violence.

Father Cordaro, quoting Phil Berrigan, told us, "The poor tell us who we are. The prophets tell us who we should be. We hide the poor, and society kills the prophets." Father Cordaro was also a hit in the talent show when he did a stand-up comedy of his action in Washington DC with the ashes.



A mass was held Saturday evening at which about 13 priests concelebrated. Most of them were parish priests from Las Vegas, having accepted an invitation from the Catholic Worker. Some women were displeased by the low profile of women in the liturgy, so they had another liturgy later that evening which was also well attended.

On Sunday morning about 450 Catholic peace activists including actor Martin Sheen attended the protest at the Nevada Test Site. There were 240 arrested, including actor Martin Sheen. Some protestors were arrested for briefly blockading the road into the nuclear testing grounds. About a dozen were arrested when they climbed through the barbed wire fence that is a boundary for the test site, which is about 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas. The rest of us were arrested when we crossed the cattle guard that is the test site boundary that leads to the main gate of the test site.

Father Frank Cordaro led our affinity group across the line, where he told the guards that he had brought with him four grandmothers. He then read the names of our grandchildren, symbolizing that the nuclear arms race is threatening to children. All those who crossed the boundary into the test site were cited, booked and released. That evening all charges were dropped.



A 20TH CENTURY VOICE IN THE DESERT

By Frank Cordaro



This article is an excerpt from one sent by Frank about the Nevada Test Site action. The full article will appear in the Catholic Mirror.

"I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOU TO PREPARE YOUR WAY: A HERALD'S VOICE IN THE DESERT, CRYING "MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, CLEAR HIM A STRAIGHT PATH" : ISAIAH

The high point of the weekend was the line crossing on Sunday morning. It is hard to convey the feeling one gets driving the sixty miles out of Las Vegas to the Nuclear Test Site. In the middle of a beautiful desert sits hundreds of square miles of our nation's nuclear testing grounds. The contrast between the beauty of the desert and the reality of the ongoing nuclear poisoning of these sacred lands leaves few unmoved.

The desert is a sacred place from many cultures. For the Christians the desert has a special significance. It was out of the desert that God led his chosen people to the Promised Land. It was from the desert that John the Baptist came forth proclaiming a baptism of repentance and forgiveness. And it was in the desert that Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights and was tempted by the devil before he started his public ministry. Throughout history holy men and women have gone to the desert to be alone with themselves, their fears, their demons and their God.

Driving through the Nevada desert to the Nuclear Test Site it's easy to see how this land demands such sacred awe. The contrasting browns and grays, the jagged horizon, the rocky surface and the barren landscape is a perfect setting for the inner struggle of the human soul.

It was my great privilege to cross the property line with my three traveling companions (Angela Cordaro, Helen Tichy, Kathryn Epperson). As we approached the line we formed our own affinity group. At the line I spoke in their names. I identified them as grand mothers from Iowa who bring with them a concern for the survival of the planet and the future of their grandchildren. I pleaded that our nation's leaders should listen to these good women's concerns and "STOP THIS INSANE ARMS RACE!" Just before we crossed the line together I read the names of all their grandchildren, sixteen in all.

We expect the charges to be dropped soon. The local county officials have dropped all such charges since April. So many hundreds of people have traveled to the Test Site and crossed the line the last couple of years they have discontinued prosecuting them. It is too expensive.

This Advent as we keep watch for the coming of our Lord we'd do well to take heed of these 20th Century Heralds from the desert. Their proclamation to "make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path," speaks to the truth of our times. There can be no real Christmas as long as we depend on Nuclear Weapons. It felt particularly right to cross the line with three grandmothers. These women instinctively know the longer we live with the Bomb the shorter our futures will be.

This desert experience in Nevada meant a lot to me. I heard loudly the message of our modern day John the Baptists, "STOP THIS INSANE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE!" Like Jesus who defined his ministry plan in the desert, I came home with a new sense of hope. If God could lead the chosen people from the desert to the promised land, we who protest at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site can help lead our generation out of Nuclear bondage into the light of a new age. A new age where war is outlawed and the future is secured for generations to come.



Upper left: Dom Helder Camara at the Test Site
Left: Angela Cordaro, Brendan Walsh (Baltimore CW), Kathryn Epperson, Helen Tichy, Frank Cordaro, Willa Walsh (Balto. CW)
Top: Crossing the line
Right : Reading the names of the children

Letters

from

Nicaragua

[We received the following letters from Marylyn Felion of Omaha. They were written by a friend of hers now living and working in Nicaragua.]

Dear Friends,

October brings my birthday and I'd like to share the excitement of that day. I spent the 3rd in Las Manos, the border crossing between Nicaragua and Honduras which has been closed since 1979. The occasion was the third opportunity Nicaraguans have had to greet relatives and friends who fled into Honduras either for personal, economic or political reasons. Both governments agreed to open the border area and allow the free entry and exit of people in both directions. This is part of Nicaragua's efforts to welcome back those who have left the country, even for the purpose of taking up arms against the government. It is also an attempt to extend Amnesty to the contras by allowing them a space to meet the Peace Commission with international press coverage, in case they do not completely trust the government.

And the crowds came ... some 15,000 to meet, to talk, to exchange impressions and even to come home. Those repatriated on the 3rd numbered 39, 24 presenting themselves to Immigration officials, 12 to the Peace Commissions and three to the Red Cross. We saw families embrace sons who were in the contras, parents meet sons who had left to avoid the draft and many reunite with family that fled at the time of the Triumph. Others waited in vain for daughters, sons, sisters and brothers. Even those people were hopeful. "We'll keep sending messages and returning to wait ..." Groups sat nervously in the booth erected by the Peace Commission, waiting for relatives who had sent word that they would return from the contras. And there were the contras themselves, some walking proudly through the crowds, willing to pose for cameras in their new tee-shirts boasting "Resistencia Nicaraguense"

The phenomenon of Amnesty is an incredible concept that has been acted out in Nicaragua since 1983. The government has promised that anyone turning themselves in to the authorities would be repatriated without reprisals. Since the Peace Accords were signed on August 6 of this year, the procedure has been modified.

There used to be an interrogation period of 7-10 days before the "desalzado" (hard to translate, but meaning one who has put down arms) was given a safe conduct pass and freed to return home. Now the person can go to any member of the local peace commission, the Red Cross or any church group. Papers are filled out and the person is free to go without ever setting foot in a government or military office.

I've been asked if I think the government is sincere or if there will be reprisals later. I've spoken to dozens of desalzados since I've been here and not one has hinted of any problem from the government. Many are afraid, however, to return to their homes because the contra operate nearby and they believe they will be kidnapped or killed. Many have gotten new land through the Agrarian Reform and all acknowledge that they have been well received in their local communities. In Ocotol, I spoke to one man who was an intelligence officer for the FDN for two years before returning on August 17 of this year. He was quite vocal about his reasons for joining the contras and his reasons for returning. He is now travelling to Las Manos and talking with the contras he meets there. He believes there is no future for the contras, no matter how much money the US sends. He tells his friends their only real choice is the Amnesty.

I could go on for pages about the implications of the Amnesty and how I believe it is a unique experience in modern history. The idea of the government offering forgiveness to those who have taken up arms against it speaks so strongly to me of Christian values. The government also challenges its citizens to extend that forgiveness in concrete ways -- welcoming the desalzados into the community and sharing the limited resources available to the people.

I have the first few issues of La Prensa, the long-awaited contribution to freedom in Nicaraguan journalism. There is a long interview with Father Enrique, the priest in Condega who heads the local peace commission. Yesterday Enrique told us that he had never spoken to a reporter from La Prensa. The paper had taken an article from La Barricada,

distorted it to suit their own purposes and published it. Recently La Prensa acknowledged receiving funds from the US and the contras claim it as their organ of truth.

Last week plans for a unilateral cease-fire were announced for three areas in the country. One of these is in Region I where I am working. Attempts will be made to have the local peace commission members go out and try to establish dialogue with the contras and explain the provisions of the Amnesty. The peace commissions are composed of church representatives, Red Cross and opposition political party members. Many of these people are strongly anti-Sandinista. The hope is that the contras will have confidence in these people, even if they are not sure of the government.

All is so exciting ... and yet the war goes on. Last Friday when we arrived in Esteli people were gathered in front of their houses, speculating about a huge explosion in the direction of Isiqui. We learned the next day that the contras had destroyed the telecommunication tower at Laguna Sta. Clara, killing one civilian and wounding two others in the incident.

It's the feast of St. Francis and I celebrate today in Ocotol. In the spirit of Francis the peacemaker, I invite you to approach your government officials, your unbelieving friends and neighbors and the media in your area and plead peace for the people of Nicaragua and all Central America.

Love,

Kathy

October 11, 1987

Dear Friends,

I'm back in Ocotol after having returned to Las Manos yesterday to monitor the border encounter. I hardly know where to begin. The week has been so full that I can barely grasp all that has happened. I'll try to go day by day hoping to make sense of what at times becomes overwhelming to me.

On Oct. 4, last Sunday, a small group of contras ambushed an unarmed construction truck transporting civilians from Patio Grande to San Juan del Rio Coco. Six people were shot and killed, including a mother and her four year old daughter. Pablo Hernandez, a friend of mine from Patio Grande, was among the dead. Pablo was one of the first campesinos I met when I arrived in Nicaragua. I had gone to Patio Grande to investigate the April 9 attack on the coop that had left five dead and many children wounded. Pablo showed me around and recounted the tragic details of the surprise attack. Now Pablo himself is dead in this senseless act of violence which brings more suffering to the community.

On the 6th I rode back to Quilali in the MRT pickup. A soldier stopped us at La Vuelta, about 15 kms. west of Quilali and informed us that there was combat ahead. He looked sadly at our white Toyota pickup and commented that it was just like the one which had been ambushed the week before in Jicaro. He then proceeded to reflect that the contras were really not interested in peace, but rather were attempting to destroy the country. Eventually we got the OK to proceed and arrived in Quilali where we learned that one soldier had been killed in the combat. One of our friends from town met us with the news that the contra radio station 15 de septiembre was announcing that anyone going out with the peace commissions would be killed. We also learned that a contra resupply plane had flown low over the town the night before, indicating that the contras were close.

On Tuesday we travelled out to La Reforma, 5 km out of town to witness the withdrawal of troops and heavy artillery from the cease-fire zone. Members of the Regional Peace Commission were present along with journalists, TV cameramen and government officials. The Regional army commander explained the parameters of the zone which includes approximately 500 square kms. Then we watched as the signal was given and the troops began to trek out, carrying cooking utensils and food supplies as well as full packs and arms. The sight of so many young men hit me again. What a waste of youth. One soldier arrived with a small parrot perched on his

shoulder. How much more appropriate than the grenade launcher which hung from his other shoulder. When the withdrawal was complete everyone proceeded back to town, where meetings were held with the townspeople to explain the meaning of the ceasefire, the Amnesty provisions and the Esquipulas Accords.

The cease-fire actually began on the 7th and reports came in that early on the morning of the 8th a group of 30 contras had moved into the zone at Las Playitas. Estimates of contra strength in the area were 150 inside the zone and 250 in the surrounding area. Small numbers, but enough to do tremendous damage through guerrilla tactics. Approximately 1,000 people live within the zone, a reminder of just how small and unpopulated Nicaragua really is.

The local peace commission members have all been targeted by the contras and are understandably afraid to go out into the cease-fire area. However, a small group of women having husbands, brothers and sons in the contras decided to go out in search of their relatives. The Red Cross and WFP offered to accompany them, hoping to provide some type of protection. WFP had decided that this was an appropriate response to the quest for peace as it is being lived at this time. I also believe that it is an appropriate act of peacemaking and felt privileged to be invited.

Thus we set out the morning of the 9th. I rode in the Red Cross truck with the women and we travelled about 5 kms into the zone over almost impassible road. At Kaulalu we met a group of 35 contras, all carrying weapons aimed at us. The leader signaled the group to stop and directed us to get down one by one and proceed to a house he indicated. The next hour and a half fall somewhere between the surreal

*...me they can kill,
but the clamor
for justice
among the people
they cannot silence...*

Archbishop
Oscar
Romero



and a nightmare. The contra leader identified himself as "Nolan", head of the Regional Command Quilali. Nolan had the glazed expression of someone on drugs, but that of course could not be substantiated. He separated us into groups and launched into a political speech about Nicaragua being a totalitarian state with no freedom. He claimed the Sandinistas were communists who had betrayed the revolution, that the cease-fire was meaningless as the area already belonged to the FDN and that the Amnesty was invalid because it implied criminality and the contras were not criminals. When he asked what we wanted, I explained that we had come to accompany the Nicaraguans who were looking for their relatives and that we wanted to talk about what could be done for peace. He claimed that the only valid dialogue had to be carried on with Adolfo Calero and Enrique Bermudez.

Nolan ranted on that the FDN would never give up until they overthrew the Sandinistas, that they would fight until true democracy was established in Nicaragua and that the Peace Accords signed at Esquipulas were worthless. He burned the newspapers we had, saying they were propaganda and that only La Prensa told the truth. He exhorted us to tell the truth, that Nicaragua was a repressive regime which allowed no freedom and that the FDN were true patriots struggling for freedom.

Next he proceeded to terrorize the 3 young Red Cross workers, calling them "piricuacos" (rabid dogs), Sandinista collaborators and worthless human beings. His tirade proceeded as he insisted their only valid option was to return and join their forces. Then he turned on the radio reporter Francisco and engaged in an extended debate on the same

(Cont'd on p. 10)

EPIPHANY PLOWSHARES SENTENCING

On Nov 17, Lin Romano and Greg Boertje of the Epiphany Plowshares group were to be sentenced for their disarmament action which took place at the Willow Grove naval air base Jan 6. Judge Raymond Broderick sentenced Lin to 2 years on one charge, 100 days on the trespassing charge, and one year suspended with 5 years probation on the third. Lin began serving her sentence Nov. 27 at the federal facility in Lexington, KY. Her address is:

Lin Romano
#37168-066
FCI
3301 Leestown Rd.
Lexington, KY 40511.

Greg Boertje chose to go underground rather than to appear for sentencing. The following statement prepared by Greg was not permitted to be read in court.

statement at sentencing - 11/17/87

It is written, in the book of Deuteronomy, "When you have plenty to eat, and live in fine houses of your own building, when your herds and flocks increase, and your silver and gold and all your possessions increase too, do not become proud and forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You must not say to yourselves, "my own strength and energy have gained me this wealth."

"If you forget the Lord your God and adhere to other gods, worshipping them and bowing down to them, I give you a solemn warning this day, that you will certainly be destroyed."

Our country is destroying itself. We worship the bloody god of military might. We are drunk on the blood that flows from Third World intervention and nuclear war preparation.

In the Persian Gulf, our warmaking diverts accountability for the Iran- Contra scandal. War criminals reign in Washington and in the military. They have plans to escalate Gulf war actions to a nuclear flashpoint.

In Europe, the treaty on intermediate range missiles does nothing to alter the danger of plans for a first strike attack. The intermediate range land idols are being replaced by nuclear cruise idols deployed at sea. Also, Star Wars research expands the current crisis by preparing for a first strike from the heavens.

In Central America, we are responsible for the continued regional flow of innocent blood.

Although resistance can continue in prison, going underground is a direct way to say no to the criminal courts which safeguard the bloody crimes of our government. In a short while, I hope to witness by nonviolent direct action and will wait to be arrested. I believe that this course of action will fulfill the responsibility to resist death and to choose life.

A major non-violent civil disobedience action is planned for March 1988 at the Nevada Test Site. Keep it in mind and check with us later for details at 243-0765.

**You are Invited to a
Retreat to Commemorate
The Feast of the
Holy Innocent
Dec. 26-28
Omaha, Nebraska**

Christians from the peace movement, the sanctuary movement, and the pro-life movement will gather to pray, to reflect and to act on the call to be witnesses of the Gospel in our world. Retreat begins Dec. 26 at 6:30 PM, culminates with non-violent witness at the SAC base Dec. 28th at 10:30 AM.

For further info, contact New Covenant J&P Center, 3503 State St. Omaha NE 68112, or call (402) 451-1212 or (402) 422-0592.

SPONSORED BY: NEW COVENANT
JUSTICE & PEACE CENTER AND
THE MUSTARD SEED COMMUNITY

The Grand Forks Air Force Base will be the focus of protest and celebration Jan. 18, 1988, Martin Luther King Day. Bemidji Friends for a Nonviolent World are sponsoring a weekend workshop on nonviolence and a peaceful civil disobedience action near the entrance to the base. Grand Forks is an arm of the Strategic Air Command and also houses a GWEN terminal. The action will be the fifth observation of King's birthday at the base. For details call or write: Bemidji Friends For A Nonviolent World PO Box 462, Bemidji, MN 56601

Robin Mahala (218) 759-1481
Kristin Sorenson (701) 775-2212



CAESAR'S QUESTIONS

(Cont'd from p. 1)

It is no accident that at Jesus' trial Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" (Jn. 18:38). Pilate, a local Caesar, asked "What is truth?" with TRUTH -- the person of Jesus -- standing right in front of him. Caesar will always be blind, and we cannot expect anything else since in Caesar "he" has become "it."

Today we need to ask the question, "Who is Jesus?" afresh in the light of the scriptures. This is not a task to be completed but an ongoing journey of personal encounter. Since Jesus is PERSON, then in all persons there is a Jesus (Mt. 25:31-46). If our encounter with him is to be true it must be done in a relationship of brothers and sisters -- not an "I -- It" or "Staff -- Client" or "Us -- Them" or "Master -- Slave" relationship.

If we keep the focus of our efforts in meeting others as brothers and sisters, many of Caesar's rationalizations fall apart. We do not give substandard housing to a sister. We do not give poor education to brothers and sisters. We do not keep our brothers unemployed. We do not allow our sister to die alone in the county home. We do not let children (and all children are our children) wait in over-crowded poor people's clinics to be treated inadequately. At least, if we call ourselves the People of God, we cannot let any of the above happen, especially if our needs are being met, and not do anything. The needs of the least are the needs of Jesus still suffering in our brothers and sisters, and still waiting to receive from us the simple, basic necessities of human life.

But we must remind ourselves constantly that Caesar's questions and answers for the poor and needy, indeed for any person, are no answers at all, since they involve no encounter with persons, no encounter with Jesus. Furthermore, if we see all people and relate to them as brothers and sisters, there is no way we can justify blowing them off the face of the earth in a so-called "Just War."

Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" is a journey and all of us are called to go on it. It is a real journey that carries with it all the responsibilities of any true relationship. We must try to meet our brothers and sisters in the truth of their beings and begin to act responsibly toward them -- not as commodities to be exploited but as persons to be loved.

This article is reprinted from the November, 1977 issue of Via Pacis.



LETTERS FROM NICARAGUA

(Cont'd from p. 9)

issues. Nolan denied any responsibility for attacks on civilians, claiming this was only propaganda by the Sandinistas.

I could go on for pages. Nolan was resolute and angry, but finally agreed to let us go as proof of contra respect for human rights. He did, however, threaten to burn our vehicle if we returned. As we were attempting to leave another vehicle arrived with Steve Kinzer of the NY Times. Nolan furiously shouted him away claiming he did not want to talk to any more reporters. Actually another group of reporters did go in later and were detained until late that night.

While all our indoctrination was taking place, the women from Quilali were able to speak to the men and learn that more contra troops would be entering the zone during the week. While Nolan claims the Sandinistas cannot be trusted, he apparently trusts them enough to concentrate his troops in the area. Family members are welcome to go in, especially if they bring food, but Nolan will not tolerate any talk of Amnesty, cease-fire or peace. My own impression is that while the contra leaders may be so hard core, the troops are eager to learn what is going on. Six men had presented themselves for Amnesty in the San Juan area and one of these was presented to the community and his family in Quilali.

And so ... I again had the opportunity to meet the contras. This time I was much more frightened, both initially and throughout the encounter because of the seeming instability of Nolan. As President Reagan continues to plead the cause of these "freedom fighters", please share my experience of the raving, physically-shaking Regional Commander of Quilali. Also keep in mind my six friends from Patio Grande who died in such utterly senseless circumstances.

The Miami Herald continues to report that Reagan claims the contras are forcing the Sandinistas to negotiate. I believe that the truth is rather that the contras are simply providing a pretext for the US to continue subverting the Peace Accords. The contras have kidnapped the priest from Waxlala, Fr. Enrique and the Baptist Pastor from the same place. The ambushes continue and prevent the extension of the cease-fire. Ultimately, the question seems to be whether the US will allow progress towards peace. One thing is absolutely clear to me. Only continuous and creative pressure from the US citizens will prevent Reagan from continuing the pursuit of war in Central America.

On a more positive note, I stand in deep admiration for all the many campesinos and local leaders who take daily risks for peace. Their courage and hope continue to challenge me to the task of peacemaking. In spite of all the efforts at war, the power of the Spirit is alive and manifest.

Much love,
Kathy





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